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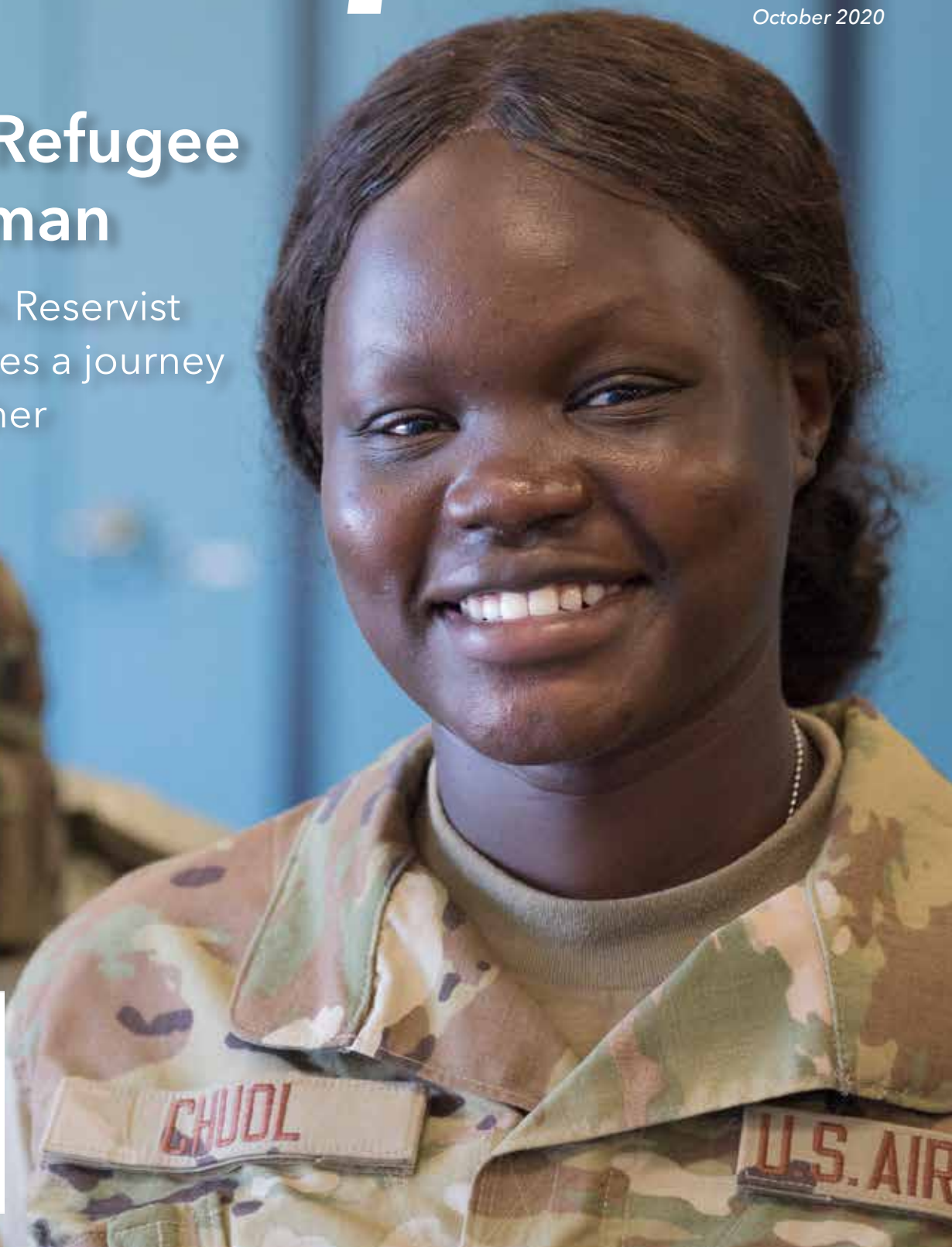
# CITIZEN AIRMAN

Volume 72 No. 5

October 2020

## From Refugee to Airman

Pittsburgh Reservist  
experiences a journey  
like no other



*Official Magazine of the Air Force Reserve*



## PHASE THREE: ACCELERATING OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### Heroes of the Air Force Reserve:

September marks my second anniversary in command. As a command team, the command chief and I continue to be amazed with your accomplishments despite every challenge that has emerged over the past year.

When the nation needed us to provide medical care for our fellow Americans, we activated more than 1,700 Reserve Citizen Airmen in support of the COVID-19 operational response. Within 48 hours of receiving the request, our team was able to send medical personnel to the points of greatest need in New York and New Jersey. Our airlift forces were also integral to transporting personal protective equipment and ventilators globally, saving countless lives.

In the face of the pandemic, you have not blinked or missed a step in carrying out your duties. As a case in point, the "Hurricane Hunters" of the 403rd Wing conducted dispersed operations from alternate operating locations when Hurricanes Laura and Sally and Tropical Storm Marco threatened Keesler Air Force Base.

Both of these examples validate the need to continue working toward our strategic priorities: prioritizing strategic depth and accelerating readiness, developing resilient leaders, and reforming the organization.

When we laid out these priorities, we also developed a four-phased approach. During my first year in command, we socialized these priorities and began fixing broken glass, in order to make your lives better. This past year, we continued to refine processes and work on reforms to improve support to your units. In the next year, we will accelerate our actions, setting them up for sustainment over the long term. As we step forward into the accelerate phase, I want to provide you a review of each of these priorities.

Prioritizing strategic depth and accelerating readiness means that we will meet our homeland defense, nuclear and conventional deterrence, and counter violent extremist obligations laid out in the National Defense Strategy. To meet these obligations, we must ensure that the Department of Defense can fully leverage the Air Force Reserve. We will continue to ensure that we hire, train and retain our most vital asset: our Airmen. We will maximize flexibility by enabling telework options for unit training assemblies where appropriate. To optimize individual readiness, we are exploring telehealth and other nontraditional modalities and are employing additional full-time medical support staff to decrease wait times and work medical cases.

Developing resilient leaders requires us to further develop strong, adaptable and confident Airmen who are able to build trust in their units, lead their teams independently and take smart risks to generate combat power for the American people. To that end, we are continuously updating our Professional Development Center courses to ensure that we are equipping your leadership with the right skills to successfully navigate the complex strategic environment. We are also working to enhance our resiliency programs by investing in more full-time command chiefs, first sergeants and chaplains. Finally, we are revitalizing and transforming the Key Spouse program by incorporating best practices from across the command to better support all Airmen and their families.

We have seen the value of resilient leaders across the command during the pandemic. When the crisis began, Chief White and I made preserving decision space for commanders one of our top priorities. We realized the impossibility of issuing "one-size-fits-all" guidance.

We had absolute confidence that our unit command teams would best be able to tailor preventative measures due to their having the clearest picture of their units and populations, missions and the local circumstances. Maintaining decision space allowed your local command teams to continue mission essential operations while preserving the force. Resilient leadership can be further empowered by having processes optimized to support those leading in the field, hence the continued need to reform the organization.

As we continue to reform the organization, we will call upon one of the greatest strengths of the Air Force Reserve: the diverse experience that Reservists bring from their civilian employers. These experiences help us to infuse best practices from industry, especially in areas like talent management, financial operations, medical readiness, space and cyberspace.

Each of these strategic priorities pursues an end state in which Reserve Citizen Airmen are expertly trained and ready to execute their mission while being exceptionally led by resilient leadership teams that relentlessly remove barriers. To that end, we look at making each Citizen Airman's experience better, through examining and reengineering those key processes where we can make impactful improvement. As always, thank you for everything you do. ■

**RICHARD W. SCOBEE**  
Lieutenant General, USAF  
Chief of Air Force Reserve  
Commander, Air Force Reserve Command



## EVEN ON A BAD DAY ...

### Reserve Citizen Airmen:

As I reflect on the past year serving as your command chief, I can't help but to think about all of the challenges we have faced together. By far, this has been one of the most challenging periods of my military career. Through good days and bad, I've learned more about myself as a leader and as a person while gaining a greater appreciation for our global contribution. Most importantly, I'm captivated by the resiliency of our Reserve Citizen Airmen.

Lt. Gen. Scobee and I are consistently awed by what you bring to the table, and even more so during these difficult times. With challenges ranging from significant budgetary constraints, to natural disasters, civil unrest and a pandemic, it seems like we just can't catch a break. We have persevered despite these challenges, and together, we will continue to push through any obstacles standing in our way.

In an effort to enhance our strategic priorities, I identified three lines of effort to focus on: comprehensive readiness, deliberate talent management and enhancing organizational trust.

With these efforts in mind, the boss and I laid in 10 full-time AGR command chief positions, primarily at host installations across the command. This created a deliberate command team leadership path for all enlisted Airmen, regardless of duty status. Our concurrent initiative for having full-time chaplains at our host installations and full-time AGR first sergeants at every wing or equivalent is in the works and should be finalized soon. These two initiatives increase our comprehensive readiness by employing mission-focused Airmen, while providing Airmen with 24/7 enlisted leadership support and the representation they deserve.

A few changes have already made a big impact within our ranks. These include revamping the hiring process for key staff and command chief positions, Senior Leader Career Management System use amongst our Reserve chiefs, and most recently, the incorporation of MyVector for development team boards. These changes reduce redundancy, give time back to Airmen, and increase efficiencies for our hiring and boarding processes. In addition, these changes directly impact our talent management decisions by giving Airmen more control over their careers. I'm excited for the changes still yet to come.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the extraordinary strides that our Professional Development Center has made this past year. The PDC team raised the bar, not only for the Reserve, but for the Air Force as a whole. I am constantly amazed by their professionalism and out-of-the-box thinking. They eliminated the Chief Orientation Course backlog of more than 270



*Lt. Gen. Richard Scobee and Chief Master Sgt. Timothy White: "We are so proud of how you have handled all of the challenges that have emerged in the past year." (Senior Master Sgt. Kori Conaway)*

Airmen, redesigned the Senior NCO Leadership Course curriculum, and most importantly, transferred all offerings to a virtual, online experience, adapting to the new COVID environment. The leadership competencies the PDC provides directly enhance our organizational trust and allow us to educate, retain, equip and support tomorrow's leaders today.

Even on a bad day, I am proud to be a Reserve Citizen Airmen. I am proud to work alongside the very best men and women this country has to offer, and as always, I am proud to be your command chief. ■

**TIMOTHY C. WHITE JR.**  
Chief Master Sergeant, USAF  
Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chief of Air Force Reserve  
Command Chief Master Sergeant, Air Force Reserve Command



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## CITIZEN AIRMAN

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# Leading the Way

Maj. Kenneth Thomas, a navigator with the 94th Airlift Wing, Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia, and his daughter, Dominica Thomas, a Civil Air Patrol cadet, pose for a photo at the Air Force Memorial in Washington D.C. in 2017. Thomas is the wing's diversity and inclusion project manager and is working on several fronts to encourage minorities and young women to consider a career in the Air Force or Air Force Reserve. (Courtesy photo)

## Dobbins navigator determined to help Air Force's diversity efforts

By Master Sgt. Chance Babin

Maj. Kenneth Thomas, a C-130 navigator assigned to the 94th Airlift Wing, Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia, and the wing's diversity and inclusion project manager, is working on several fronts to encourage minorities and young women to consider a career in the Air Force or Air Force Reserve.

Growing up with his grandmother in the Bronx, Thomas didn't know much about the Air Force, much less being a rated aviator.

He knew his mother was in the Air Force and his uncle was in the Navy, but it wasn't until he attended an air show with his mother, who worked on the F-15 Eagle, that he began to take an interest in being part of the Air Force.

"My mother would take me to the air shows," he said. "I was amazed by the airplanes and the Thunderbirds. After that, my interest was drawn to movies and video games that were related to airplanes."

Thomas eventually enlisted in the Air Force, following his mother and father, who both served.

"I was an electronic warfare technician on the F-16," he said. "While I was in tech school as an Airman at Keesler Air Force Base (Mississippi), my dad was going through Officer Training School at Maxwell (AFB, Alabama)."

His dad was also enlisted before making the move to attend OTS.

Right, a group photo from a Legacy Flight Academy's Eyes Above the Horizon event at Moton Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 2019. The group is comprised of various Total Force Airmen who volunteered to support the youth in aviation event. (Courtesy photo) Below, retired Brig. Gen. Charles McGee, an original Tuskegee Airmen, poses with Thomas at a Legacy Flight Academy event. (Courtesy photo)



"My commander allowed me to miss a day of training to attend my father's commissioning ceremony," Thomas said. "That's when I gave him his first salute. My father told me 'these new lieutenants are no smarter than you. You are fully capable of becoming an officer too.' That was the first time I really believed I could actually become an Air Force officer. I was in Air Force ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) three years later."

Thomas was quick to raise his hand when the 94th was looking for someone to run the diversity and inclusion program a couple of years ago.

"I understand the importance of representation in leadership positions and the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) career fields," he said. "As an enlisted Airman, I felt there was a diverse workforce, but I didn't see much representation in the officer corps, especially in rated careers. Once I commissioned, I recognized my perception as an Airman was real."

As a young officer, he saw the opportunity to introduce aviation to young people of all backgrounds.

"As a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, I was heavily involved in community service," he said. "I ran a nonprofit

organization and was on multiple committees that addressed the disparity of education for young people. I was in tune with the heartbeat of our underserved youth."

Thomas also volunteered to be an instructor at the combat system officer course at Pensacola Naval Air Station, Florida, knowing he could be a role model for upcoming Air Force officers.

"I felt it was an opportunity to have a huge influence on the Air Force's youngest aviators in training," he said. "When I went through navigator training, I had good instructors who pushed me to succeed, and I wanted to be that for them."

Thomas also took part in the Air Force's first ACE Flight Program (now Aim High Flight Academy), an initiative aimed at combating the growing pilot shortage affecting the Air Force. The initial ACE program was a joint effort between the Air Force and Delaware State University to provide students initial flight training in civilian aircraft and a structured environment that provides exposure and education on military aviation careers.

"I had the honor and privilege of being the assistant director of the first ACE Flight Academy," he said. "The kids motivated me more than they could've imagined. I'm glad I had the support of my leadership to allow me to take part in this impactful TDY to Dover."

Thomas is also the president of Legacy Flight Academy, a nonprofit organization that conducts character-based youth aviation programs that draw upon the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen.

All LFA events are free to attendees. LFA's comprehensive, three-tiered building block approach works in tandem with partner organizations to help minorities and other underserved and underrepresented youth achieve success as aerospace, science, technology, engineering and math professionals, particularly emphasizing military career opportunities.

In July, more than 30 students from across six states simultaneously experienced the joys of flight during LFA's virtual Legacy Flight Across America.

"During this LFA experience, students learned about the first class of aviation cadets who entered preflight training at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama on July 19, 1941," Thomas said. "The event, which was broadcast live via social media included on-site interviews and live interactions with students."



Thomas also leads Legacy Flight Academy's Eyes Above the Horizon program, a single-day flight orientation and STEAM-focused program. Eyes Above the Horizon gives young people from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds an opportunity to develop an interest in STEAM careers through flights, mentorships and immersion into the rich history of the Air Force. It also draws on the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen to inspire students to consider an Air Force career.

LFA's programs give flights to hundreds of kids each year and inspire thousands more. LFA volunteers are mostly Airmen looking to make a difference in the communities around them.

To promote rated opportunities in the Air Force to diverse populations, Air Force Recruiting Service stood up Detachment 1 in October 2018. Det. 1 develops innovative programs supporting Total Force (active duty, Guard and Reserve) recruiting efforts and is the tactical execution arm of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's rated diversity improvement initiative. The mission of Det. 1 is to inform, influence and inspire tomorrow's leaders through innovative outreach opportunities.

Thomas works with Det. 1 on many of its outreach programs. "I think it's about time," Thomas said. "The disparity of minorities in rated careers and the higher ranks is appalling. I feel as though the Air Force is making its actions match its words. The Air Force has said over and over how important efforts like this are, and Det. 1 is a step in the right direction."

Det. 1 runs the Aim High Flight Academy, but COVID-19 made in-person classes impossible.

"Lt. Col. Lindsey Andrew and I came up with the plan to conduct the Aim High Flight Academy virtually," Thomas said. "She had the great idea to fund the student's private pilot certificate. Before the students start flying, they have eight virtual mentorship sessions over eight weeks."

Although Thomas was not exposed to aviation when he was young, he has been able to show his daughter from a young age what it's like to be an aviator.

"When I started flying in the Air Force my daughter (Dominica) was 8 years old," he said. "I wanted her to be introduced to flying at a much younger age than I was. At first she just thought it was something cool. As time went on, I exposed her to youth aviation camps and programs. I always shared my stories of flying but never pushed her too hard. I just kept her around airplanes."

At a Legacy Flight Academy event, Thomas's daughter heard about the Civil Air Patrol. A week later, she told him she wanted to join CAP.

"She went to the first meeting and really enjoyed it," he said. "She said she felt a little uneasy because she was the only minority. When she told me this, I told her I wouldn't force her to stay, but she would be missing a great opportunity if she let that stop her."

She stuck with CAP and earned promotions at every opportunity.

"CAP nominated her for the ACE program, which she attended and completed her solo flight," Thomas said. "When she moved to her new squadron in Marietta, Georgia, she became the Civil Air Patrol commander because of her leadership and hard work."

Thomas said he believes exposing his daughter to aviation early will definitely give her a leg up if she decides to pursue a career in aviation.

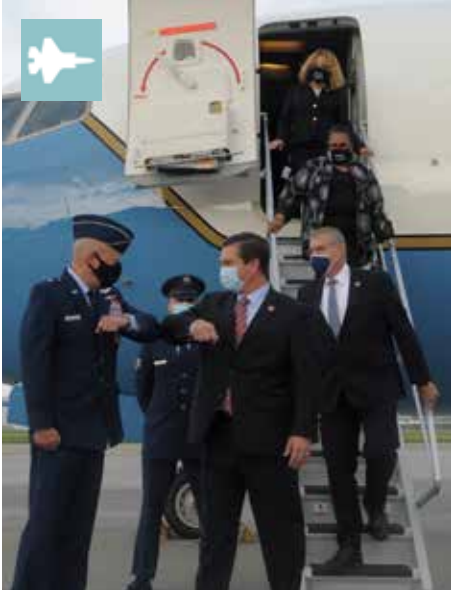
"She wants to be a fighter pilot in the Air Force," he said. "She is better set up than I could have ever been. She is a senior in high school and is finishing up her private pilot license. She got into aviation early and is surrounded by great mentors who will ensure her success." #ReserveResilient

(Babin is assigned to the Air Force Recruiting Service public affairs office.)



## Reservists provide support for Rep. John Lewis' funeral

By Senior Airman Shelby Thurman



Top and left, Dobbins Air Reserve Base leadership stand at attention and greet members of Congress who arrived for the funeral of Rep. John Lewis. (Senior Airman Shelby Thurman) Above, an armed forces body bearer team carries Lewis' flag-draped casket. (Airman 1st Class Kendra A. Ransum)

Several members of Congress, including Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, relied on the Air Force Reserve for transportation support to attend the funeral of Rep. John Lewis at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in downtown Atlanta July 30.

Pelosi and others flew into Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia, on two C-40C Clippers from the Reserve's 932nd Airlift Wing, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, before being driven to Lewis' service.

Dobbins leadership, including Brig. Gen. Thomas Grabowski, Georgia Air National Guard commander; Col. Craig McPike, 94th Airlift Wing commander; Col. Sharon Johnson, 22nd Air Force director of staff; and Chief Master Sgt. Vicki Robertson, 94th AW command

chief, welcomed the Congressional members as they stepped off the two planes.

"I want to thank all of my wingmen at the 932nd for a great event here at Dobbins," McPike said. "The two C-40s, aircrews and maintainers did an outstanding job delivering the members of Congress to Georgia. They were the utmost professionals, as always, and represented the 22nd Air Force and the Air Force Reserve with precise, on-time airlift for our distinguished visitors. I could not have been more proud."

The day before the Congressional members arrived, an armed forces body bearer team carried the flag-draped casket of Lewis from an 89th Airlift Wing C-32 aircraft to a hearse parked on the flight line. The hearse then made its way to the state capitol, where the late representative

lay in repose prior to the funeral service and internment.

"The flight carrying Congressional members to the funeral of Rep. John Lewis highlights what our Airmen do every day," said Col. Glenn Collins, 932nd AW commander. "It is an entire team which supports these missions. I am humbled and proud to be a part of the 932nd Airlift Wing every day. The 932nd Airlift Wing was privileged to be part of our nation's history honoring the life of Rep. John Lewis."

Lewis served as a Georgia representative for three decades and had a lifelong commitment to the civil rights movement. #ReserveReady  
(Thurman is assigned to the 94th Airlift Wing public affairs office.)





# Schoolhouse Innovation

## Special operations maintainers get creative to keep unique aircraft flying

By Nicole King

*C-146A Wolfhounds sit on the flightline at Duke Field, Florida, in 2019. Citizen Air Commandos from the Reserve's 919th Special Operations Wing work alongside active-duty members and contractors to ensure the Wolfhounds are able to execute missions in austere environments around the globe on short notice. (Senior Airman Dylan Gentile)*

In a small hangar in northwest Florida, a unique maintenance enterprise is forging ahead with innovative techniques for training on and maintaining an aircraft most members of the Air Force have never seen.

Duke Field is home to the C-146A Wolfhound, a commercially derived Air Force plane, also known as a nonstandard aviation aircraft, that provides flexible, responsive and operational movement of small teams needed in support of theater special operations commands.

Citizen Air Commandos from the 919th Special Operations Wing work alongside active-duty members and contractors to keep the Wolfhound available and ready to execute missions every day in austere environments around the globe.

"We have the only C-146 aircraft in Air Force Special Operations Command and Air Force Reserve Command, and we bring to the fight a mission set where we can do small, important missions more discreetly and more effectively than the other Air Force assets can," said Chief Master Sgt. Mark Harrell, aircraft maintenance unit superintendent for the 919th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

While many Reserve maintainers go to technical school with their active-duty counterparts to undergo training on a specific aircraft based at their follow-on assignment, maintainers heading to the 919th SOW to work on the Wolfhound follow a different path.

"Most people go to their specific airframe school and learn the fundamentals about that aircraft," said Senior Master Sgt. Michael Tomi, 919th Special Operations Aircraft Maintenance Squadron production superintendent. "We had to develop our own program and on-the-job training for our aircraft here. Our new Reservists go to a C-130 tech school and then come here and we'll train them on the C-146."

There are no military technical manuals for the Wolfhound like there are for aircraft manufactured for the military. The C-146A was originally a civilian aircraft that joined the Air Force ranks in June 2011.

At that time, maintainers from the 919th SOAMXS, the 919th Special Operations Maintenance Squadron and the 592nd Special Operations Maintenance Squadron received training to pass down to new Airmen. With no Air Force C-146



schools in existence, the maintainers had to build the school from the ground up for a different kind of maintainer.

"This aircraft was built for more of an airframe and power plant-type mechanic, which is what the Air Force at Duke Field is becoming, without being truly A&P certified mechanics," Harrell said.

A&P mechanics are certified with a more general understanding of aircraft maintenance and use that foundational knowledge to maintain civilian aircraft, Harrell said.

Since there are no military technical manuals for the Wolfhound, 90% of training for the aircraft is done by Airmen working on day-to-day operations on the flight line to get familiar with how the aircraft operates. Learning the aircraft is truly a team effort with active-duty Airmen, Reservists and contractors all working together to make sure the mission is accomplished.

"We have our active-duty brothers and sisters, who provide fresh input from different aspects of the mission and the Reserve side provides the stability of someone being in the career field for five to 10 years," Harrell said. "On top of that, you have the systems experts (contractors) from the Sierra Nevada Corporation, who have had this program since its inception. It is just a well-rounded mission."

The scheduling and planning section for Wolfhound maintenance also had to adjust to the commercial model. Instead of crew chiefs using the regular Air Force forms to write up maintenance and job numbers, the scheduling section tracks these items. This unique method of data entry has minimized entry errors and streamlined the maintenance process.

"Since we changed the process, we've seen an increase in our fully mission capable, aircraft availability and mission effectiveness rates with a better emphasis on other trends in problem areas," Tomi said. "Being more predictive in how we see problems, how we correct them and how we can reduce those problems from happening again increases aircraft availability."

The innovation and new ideas implemented by Citizen Air Commandos at the 919th Special Operations Maintenance Group continue to keep the C-146 ready for aircrews to accomplish their mission any time, any place. #ReserveReady #ReserveReform

(King is assigned to the 919th Special Operations Wing public affairs office.)

*Top, Senior Airmen Logan Strickland and Kennedy Brown service the oil on a C-146A Wolfhound. (Senior Airman Dylan Gentile) Middle, Staff Sgt. Benjamin Hetzel connects hoses on a C-146A engine as part of routine maintenance. (Dan Maffett) Bottom, Senior Airman Gaven Browning marshals a C-146A into place. (Senior Airman Dylan Gentile)*





*Far left, Senior Master Sgt. Aaron McLaughlin, 18th Air Refueling Squadron boom operator and loadmaster, surveys a cargo pallet during the first Reserve-led KC-46 cargo load mission in August. (Tech. Sgt. Abigail Klein) Left, Tech. Sgt. Leah Oakleaf, 931st Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chief, reviews her technical order for configuration plans of the fuselage cargo palette locks during the first aeromedical evacuation of live patients to be carried out by the KC-46 in July. (Airman First Class Nilsa Garcia)*

# A Busy Summer

## Reserve wing reaches milestones flying KC-46A

By Tech. Sgt. Abigail Klein



The Air Force Reserve's 931st Air Refueling Wing, McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, has had a busy summer flying milestone missions in the KC-46A, the Air Force's newest tanker.

In July, Reserve Citizen Airmen from the 931st ARW and 22nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, participated in a Total Force mission to test capabilities of the KC-46A during its first aeromedical evacuation.

Over the course of six flights and 17 hours, the mission, which originated at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, transited five patients and two attendees to Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia; Patrick AFB, Florida; and Travis AFB, California. The mission was evaluated by the Air Force Testing and Evaluation Center.

"I don't think most people realize the amount of training and dedication the team has when they come out and do a mission like this," said Maj. Michael Murphy, 905th Air Refueling Squadron pilot. "Everyone really performed well and at a high level."

The KC-46 has undergone extensive testing this past year, led by the Air Force Testing and Evaluation Center, to evaluate the aircraft's capabilities to support aeromedical evacuation. After the

resolution of key discrepancies, the successful completion of the first operational mission represents a significant milestone in the aircraft's ability to demonstrate one of its three mission sets: aerial refueling, airlift and aeromedical evacuation.

"Some of the things we were looking for was whether or not the aircraft could sustain patient care over a 14-hour span," said Master Sgt. Heath Hampton, Detachment 3 Initial Operational Test and Evaluations section chief for the KC-46 program. "That was proven today. It was a proof of concept that the KC-46 could be used as a viable aeromedical evacuation platform."

An integral factor for the successful execution of the mission was the notable patient care provided by the aeromedical evacuation team. Aeromedical evacuation plays a significant role in the nation's global capabilities as it provides time sensitive and mission critical patient care during transport to their home installations for follow-on care.

The total force team, comprised of two flight nurses and three medical technicians (all qualified on the KC-46), used a syllabus that included numerous patient scenarios and configurations to guide the execution of the training.

"It's incredible how AE touches the patient from point of injury all the way back home," said Lt. Col. Jason Arndt, 133rd Airlift Wing branch chief of aeromedical evacuation. "Throughout this whole journey there's Total Force involved. It's nice when a whole team can come together and work seamlessly to transport patients safely and effectively."

In August, McConnell Airmen performed the first Reserve-led KC-46 cargo load mission.

Eight Airmen from all three Reserve McConnell air refueling squadrons participated in a cargo load that flew more than 18,500 miles, traveling from the plains of Kansas to Australia.

In addition to McConnell Reserve aircrew members from the 924th, 905th and 18th Air Refueling Squadrons, two members of the 931st Maintenance Group, one member of the 22nd Maintenance Group, and one evaluator from Travis Air Force Base, California, were also involved to ensure the KC-46 was ready to make the six-day journey from McConnell to Royal Australian Air Force Richmond, New South Wales, Australia, and back.

Since receiving the KC-46 in January 2019, the boom operators' role as loadmasters for both strategic airlift and air refueling as the tanker has increased, as the storage space for mobility pallets is greater than the KC-135 Stratotanker.

Though all four boom operators from the 924 ARS and one from the 18 ARS had prior cargo load experience with the KC-135 Stratotanker, all KC-46 cargo loading missions require different loading methods and techniques. The trip to RAAF Base Richmond strengthened the boom operators' abilities to rapidly transport larger cargo on the KC-46.

"We were trained to load cargo before on the KC-135, but we didn't do it very often," said Master Sgt. Bryan Fehrenbach, 924th ARS boom operator. "This training helps us to fully utilize the capabilities of the KC-46, to take cargo and also passengers and medical evacuation."

The crew left McConnell early on August 15, and picked up their first cargo load of more than 11,000 pounds at Travis AFB. This cargo was then delivered to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. Despite the Airmen's experience, Fehrenbach says cargo loading is always a challenge.

"With the aircraft, there are always different restrictions with weight and where it is supposed to go, because you don't want to overload the aircraft," he said. "You also have to maintain the center of gravity."

After offloading and uploading more cargo pallets at JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam, the crew headed to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, on August 16. The crew then traveled all the way to the Southern Hemisphere, landing at the RAAF base on August 17.

To get back to McConnell, the team did the reverse trip back, uploading cargo at Andersen AFB to deliver to Travis AFB.

According to Fehrenbach, the Reserve aircrews plan to do more cargo loads in more challenging scenarios in the future, further extending the Reserve flying squadrons' capabilities overseas, and the reach of the 931st Air Refueling Wing and Team McConnell overall. *#ReserveReady #ReserveReform*

*(Klein is assigned to the 931st Air Refueling Wing's public affairs office.)*



# From Refugee to Airman

Pittsburgh Reservist experiences a journey like no other

*Airman 1st Class Nyarauch Chuol is a passenger operations representative with the 32nd Aerial Port Squadron, Pittsburgh International Airport Air Reserve Station, Pennsylvania. Chuol joined the military because she witnessed military members giving vaccines and helping refugees like her when she was young. (Senior Airman Grace Thomson)*

By Senior Airman Grace Thomson



For some, the reason for joining the military is very simple – whether it is tuition help, family legacy, honor or for the love of country. For others, the reason they join the military goes much deeper. Something in their past makes them itch to give back and help others. For one member of the 911th Airlift Wing, Pittsburgh International Airport Air Reserve Station, Pennsylvania, the reason goes even deeper still.

Airman 1st Class Nyarauch Chuol, a passenger operations representative with the 32nd Aerial Port Squadron, was a South Sudanese refugee born in an Ethiopian camp. She and her family moved to the United States in 1999 after getting a family-based visa. Her story is filled with hardships she has overcome and triumphs she rejoiced in, but she said she wouldn't change it for the world and that she is "a better person for it."

Some of her earliest memories include U.S. military members helping her and her family. There were other military units where she was from, but they often scared her, she said. It was not until the Americans showed consistency in their helpfulness that she began to admire them and the work they did.

"When I was in Ethiopia living in a refugee camp, you'd see a lot of military members who would come in and help," said Chuol. "A lot of medical members would come in and give vaccines, and I would see them walking around with their military uniforms, and they were all very nice, and it made me want to help. I just looked at them like, 'oh man, that would be so cool to be able to do that one day.'"

Growing up in a refugee camp was difficult for her and her family. She lost a brother to an unknown sickness before the military arrived with vaccines. She recalls the details of the day she found out her brother was gone.

"I remember one day I'd walked to school, and it was around a five-mile walk and it was hot," said Chuol. "I went home, and my mother was sitting on a mat and she wouldn't say anything to me. She was just staring at the ground. I didn't know what was going on. I looked around the house, and I didn't see my brother, and I figured he had passed."

At the time, Chuol had been sick too, but she was one of the lucky ones. Military members came to the refugee camp and started giving vaccines to the children, and Chuol was one of those fortunate few. She said she remembers wishing her brother would have been able to get the vaccine, as well, but that she believes she had been chosen for a reason.

Her decision to join the military could have come from this event, she said. It informed her view of the American military and gave her the drive to do something good with the life she was given.

"We all have different motivations in life that make us want to serve and there are many different paths that lead us there," said Chief Master Sgt. Christopher Scott, superintendent with the 32nd APS. Scott is one of Chuol's supervisors, and he was impressed by her journey to the Air Force Reserve. When he heard her story for the first time, he was amazed.

"When new members first arrive to our unit, we ask that they stand up in front of the unit and introduce themselves, say where

they're from, what made them join the Air Force Reserve and a unique item about them that others may not know," said Scott. "This is when I first learned of her story and thought 'Wow, more people need to hear this.'"

Chuol didn't just jump from an Ethiopian refugee camp into the Air Force Reserve. There were years in between that helped her get to where she is today.

First, Chuol had to immigrate, and that was not an easy feat for her family. Thankfully for Chuol, getting to the United States was a goal her father had for the family in order to give them a better life, and he would not be easily discouraged.

He entered them into a lottery system where a family could have the opportunity to get a family-based immigration visa based on certain criteria, such as family reunification, job-based immigration or diversity.

They immigrated to the United States as a part of the Immigration Act of 1990, which was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush. It was enacted to diversify the visa program and to create a lottery to help immigrants from countries whose citizenry was underrepresented in the United States.

Even after they got their visa approved, getting to the United States was still a challenge.

"There are people who did not want you to leave the country or they wanted to hold you for ransom," said Chuol. "Because they can say 'hey, I'm going to keep this person unless you can give me this much money.' Oftentimes we were stopped by government officials or the bus sometimes would get stuck in weird terrain."

Finally, in December 1999, they made it onto the plane and began their long journey to their new country. The experience was a new one for her family but Chuol remembers that it was slightly frightening and embarrassing as well.

"It was the first time I ever flew on a plane, and it was so scary," said Chuol. "I went into the bathroom and I got stuck in the door. That was kind of scary and when I finally left the bathroom, I was distraught and thinking 'oh my god I cannot believe this.'"

When they made it to America, they were introduced to their new home and were amazed by the size and luxury of the house. They now had so much more than they had even dreamed of, and when everything is a new experience it can be an enchanted time.

"I've never walked into a home like that because I was used to living in a straw hut," she said. "They said, 'this can be your room, and this is a master bedroom, and this is a light switch and a faucet.' I thought, 'this is heaven.' It was magical at the time, you could say."

That magic eventually wore off as they settled into their new life. They moved to different cities over the years to figure out where they liked it best. First, it was New York City, then they moved to Memphis, Tennessee, then finally Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was in Minneapolis that her parents received their citizenship, and since Chuol and her brothers were underage, they did as well.



While her family still lives in Minnesota, Chuol had one more place to go before she found a place she called home. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania was her final stop and it's where she and her husband decided to set up shop – literally.

“My husband and I are starting a company right now,” said Chuol. “It's called Jiopy Design. It's a cosmetic health and wellness company for skincare, haircare, nails, whatever you can think of.”

The company is named after her youngest brother, and although the COVID-19 pandemic is making it hard to start a business, they are doing their best to get it off the ground. While living through the pandemic is difficult, Chuol is no stranger to adversity.

“Being an immigrant child was very hard, especially with my parents,” said Chuol. “They relied on me a lot to help them with paperwork and bills. When someone came to the house, and they didn't know who it was, it was up to me to speak the little English I knew and ask ‘What are you doing here? What do you want?’”

Chuol is the oldest child in her family. It was up to her to learn English very quickly so that she could translate for her parents and help them assimilate, get jobs and even study for their citizenship test. She also took part in raising her younger siblings and became a parental figure for them in their early life.

All of these responsibilities were put on her at age eight and it was a lot of pressure, she said. Between that and the pressure of trying to fit in at school, she had trouble finding the right balance.

“I never really fit in with most folks,” she said. “I moved around a lot, so I never was able to establish friendships or a home base. I was always trying to figure out who I was in different scenarios or different situations and groups of people.”

The uncertainty of not knowing who she was or where she belonged gave her some difficulty growing up.

“I would find myself getting in trouble because I would try to be funny,” she said. “But I had some counseling, I got involved in sports where I actually made friends. And I would do a lot of self-reflection, trying to figure out who I was and where am I going.”

Once she figured out her direction and interests, she began to flourish. She said that she became proud of herself and her newfound independence.

“If I needed something, I could find it and I wouldn't stop until I did,” Chuol said. “I became a really good caregiver. I was the hardest working person in the room. I was really proud of my motivation, just knowing that I can't go back to that [her refugee life]. I'm here [in America] and this is my home. I'm going to do well.”

Chuol's determination and drive helped get her to where she is today. Her dream growing up was to become a doctor; she thought that would do the most good in the world, but the schooling took longer than she wanted.

“So, I decided to join the military,” she said. “Then I figured later on if I choose to go that [medical] path, at least I'll have a military background that can help me get into those countries to help.”



Far left, Chuol, at about age 2. (Courtesy photo) Left, Chuol and her family pose for a photo in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, on an unknown date. Chuol's family immigrated to the United States in 1999 from Ethiopia as part of the Immigration Act of 1990. (Courtesy Photo) Below, Chuol at work at the 911th Airlift Wing. (Senior Airman Grace Tomson)



Her main goal in life is to give back anywhere she can. From helping her family settle in America when she was just learning how to speak English, to volunteering at soup kitchens and going on mission trips with her church, to finally making the decision to join the Air Force Reserve, she embodies the core value of “service before self.”

“I enjoy being in the military. I feel like I'm living my life, and I'm able to give back,” said Chuol. “I hope that one day one of my brothers will follow in my footsteps, or even my future children. I hope that I can lead the way, that I can be a good example.”

Her military career so far exemplifies her willingness to volunteer and her inherent need to do more in her community.

“She was inquiring about things she can do before she was even back from tech school,” said Tech Sgt. Gregory Gausa, program coordinator with the 911th Airlift Wing Development and Training Flight. “What can she do to further her training, what can she do to try to get a job out here full time?”

Although she has not been in the unit for very long, she has already left quite the impression on her fellow Airmen and supervisors.

“She seems to be very open to getting to know others as well as allowing others to get to know her,” said Scott.

This chapter of her life is just beginning, but her story is already packed full of incredible experiences. Although her story is one full of hardships, triumphs and sacrifices, she says she is just trying to live her life.

“I want people to know I am a normal person, just like everyone else,” said Chuol. “I look different, and I'm okay with that. But I'm just the same as everyone else just with different experiences.” #ReserveResilient

(Thomson is assigned to the 911th Airlift Wing public affairs office.)

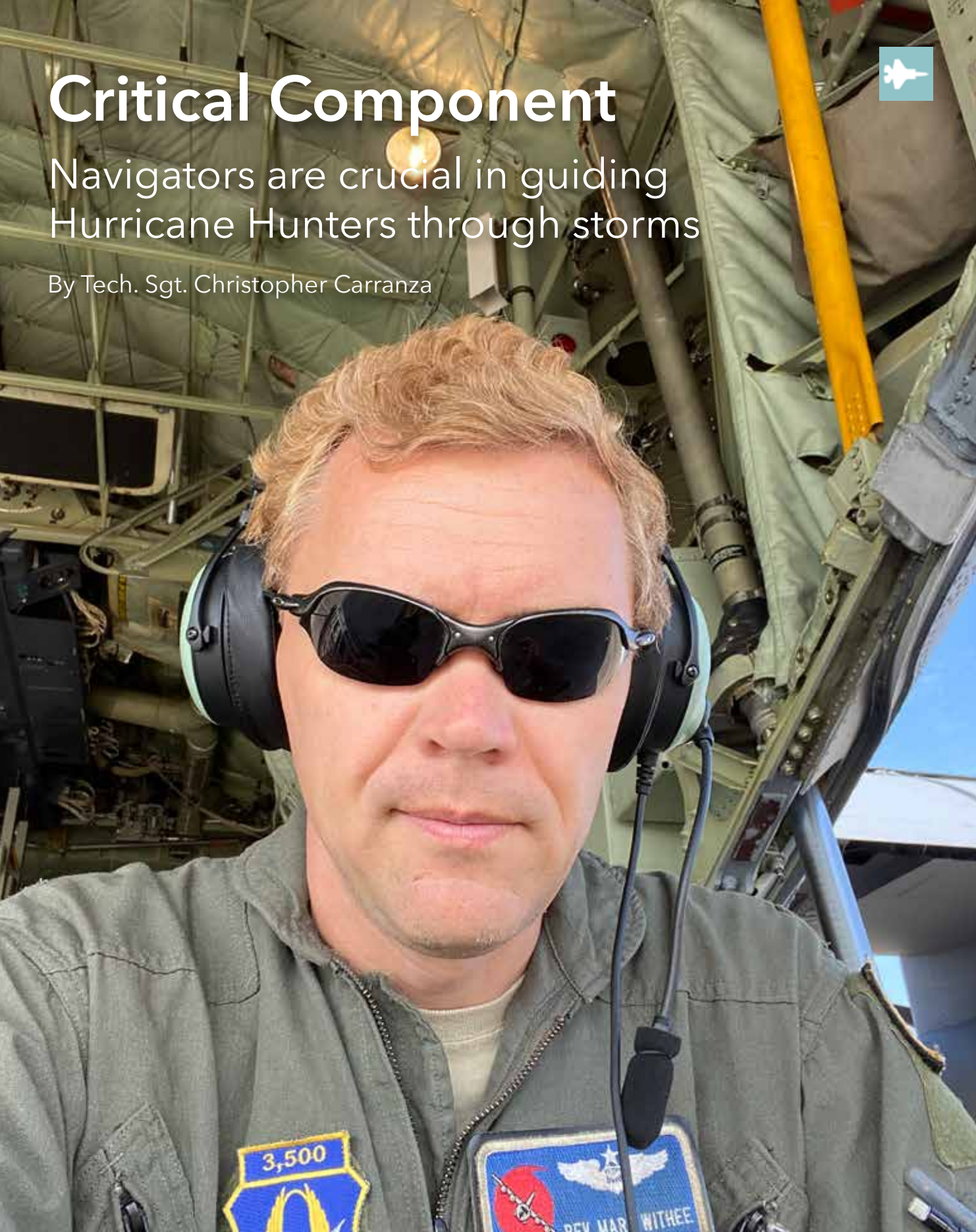
The family of Airman 1st Class Nyarauch Chuol poses for a photo outside of their home in Gambela, Ethiopia, in 2011. Chuol was born in a house very similar to the one in the photo. (Courtesy Photo)



# Critical Component

## Navigators are crucial in guiding Hurricane Hunters through storms

By Tech. Sgt. Christopher Carranza



Maj. Mark Withee, 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron navigator, has been flying with the Air Force Reserve for five years and has more than 3,600 flight hours in the C-130. (Courtesy photo)



The Air Force Reserve 403rd Wing's 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, based at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, is the only Department of Defense organization that flies weather reconnaissance.

In this specialized unit of Reserve Citizen Airmen, a crew is made up of a minimum of five members, consisting of a pilot, copilot, navigator, aerial reconnaissance weather officer and loadmaster, who is also the dropsonde operator.

While the pilots handle the controls of the WC-130J Super Hercules and make a lot of headlines, there is a person positioned behind them – the navigator, who is equally critical to mission success.

These aerial pathfinders, like Capt. Julie Fantaske, add to the safety of the weather mission. She has been a Reserve Citizen Airman for 17 years and was a prior C-130 tactical airlift crew chief.

"Although the navigator (position) has gone away in other aircraft, we're an extra measure of safety," said Fantaske. "We're an extra set of eyes and ears, we're able to call things out and interject when needed, and it's a very humbling experience to know the mission we accomplish has a real-time impact."

Fantaske said that when the pilots are busy handling the airplane through severe weather, flying can be intense and navigators are there to assist when necessary.

Navigators are responsible for preparing flight plans, which include routes, headings, checkpoints and times. During flight, they operate from their station using equipment such as GPS, radio, radar and communication systems that assist in guiding the aircraft through weather.

"Like many of us in aircrew positions, we have people skills necessary to communicate amongst the crew," said Maj. Mark Withee, 53rd WRS navigator. "As a nav, we have to be the middle man between the weather officer and pilots, and we have to be able to compromise on a route to get to an area of interest, which is crucial in a storm."

Withee explained that while weather officers are gathering weather data and are requesting flyover of an area of

interest, it may not be safe for the aircraft to take a direct route. Thus, the navigator plots the safest course to accomplish the request and accomplish their mission.

Prior to flying with the Hurricane Hunters, Withee flew tactical airlift with a couple of active duty units and has multiple tours in the Middle East.

"My career has always been in the C-130, so flying in the WC-130 is no different as I am very familiar with it and guiding the crew is very streamline," said Withee. "Flying with five of your closest friends is very fulfilling knowing that our mission has a direct impact on people's lives."

The Oregon native has been flying with the Air Force Reserve for five years and has more than 3,600 flight hours in the C-130. He said his most memorable storm was a night flight during Hurricane Michael, because as they were tracking it, the hurricane was rapidly intensifying and made his job that much more busy

and exciting due to the constant changes in flightpaths as the storm neared land.

The Hurricane Hunters' goal is to get the aircraft and its crew through their weather data collection mission and send that information to the National Hurricane Center for forecasters to plug into their weather models for better forecasting predictions. The overall goal is to save lives and infrastructure through warnings and advisories generated by the collected data.

"Being able to witness the immediate impact our mission has on the people who are affected by the storms we track is in itself a reward. Being able to help anyone on the ground is an amazing feeling," said Fantaske. "This is the best job I've ever had and I would not trade it for any other." #ReserveReady

(Carranza is assigned to the 403rd Wing's public affairs office.)



Capt. Julie Fantaske, navigator for the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, works a flight through Hurricane Douglas in July. The 53rd WRS is part of the Air Force Reserve's 403rd Wing and is the only unit of its kind in the Department of Defense. (Senior Airman Kristen Pittman)



# Total Force in Action

## Reserve mental health team provides pandemic support at Academy



Story by Bo Joyner  
Photos by Trevor Cokley

It was just before 7 a.m. on a Friday morning in July and Col. (Dr.) Mario Tommasi was getting ready to start his work day at Rutgers University in New Jersey when his phone rang.

The voice on the other end wanted to know if Tommasi, a psychologist, could lead a team of Air Force Reserve mental health professionals on a mission to support cadets at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado who may be challenged by the rigors of Academy life in midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within a week, Tommasi, who serves as the individual mobilization augmentee to the Air Force director of psychological health, and five hand-selected Reserve mental health professionals were at the Academy, tasked with providing support to cadets who, in one way or another, were impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

"Some cadets were identified as positive for COVID-19, others had symptoms and were awaiting test results, still others were contact traced to a person who was positive for COVID-19," Tommasi said. "These cadets were moved to quarantine and isolation areas within the dorms, and the stress on the cadets and the staff was significant."

The Reserve mental health team went to work right away. In addition to Tommasi, the team was comprised of Col. Susan Beylotte, Lt. Col. Brande Newsome, Maj. Mayara Coulter, Staff Sgt. Melissa Mendez and Senior Airman Vivian Gaytan.

"The first thing we did was coordinate with the existing mental health team and cadet wing leadership to devise a plan that would augment the dorm-imbedded supportive work that was already being done. To this end, my team integrated itself into a schedule of support that included us

*Opposite page, five members of the Air Force Reserve mental health team who spent 54 days at the Air Force Academy helping cadets deal with the rigors of Academy life in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic pose for a photo. Left to right are Col. (Dr.) Mario Tommasi, Staff Sgt. Melissa Mendez, Col. Susan Beylotte, Lt. Col. Brande Newsome and Senior Airman Vivian Gaytan. Right, team member Maj. Mayara Coulter (left) confers with a cadet.*



working shifts that did not end until around 9 p.m., seven days a week for the majority of the mission," Tommasi said.

The team used an improvised embedded mental health approach that included extensive presence within the cadet dorms. Team members reached cadets through planned coaching, informal hallway engagements and doorway consultations. The team also made extensive efforts to consult and advise with the staff and cadet leadership.

"We advised on specific cadet issues, dorm wellness climate and we made suggestions on how to address future issues before they arose," Tommasi said.

By the end of the 54-day mission, the team had more than 1,000 episodes of contact with cadets, many of which were follow-ups and continued conversations.

"This is important because in so doing, we were able to show a continuity of care despite rapidly changing conditions among the cadets and dorm arrangements," Tommasi said. "The feedback was uniformly positive and appreciative. A common theme was something like, 'it feels good to know somebody cares' and 'talking to someone about this is really helpful.'"

Lt. Col. El-Len Serra, a Reservist who is currently serving as the deputy director for culture and climate at the Academy, said the team performed even better than expected.

"I think this is one of those situations where the people who volunteered to come here were the six perfect people for the job," she said. "When they got here, we got them their access and they hit the ground running. They had a wealth of knowledge and experience and they used it to support our cadets, who were extremely appreciative of their services."

Newsome, a licensed clinical social worker and the deputy director of the Reserve Affairs Medical Directorate, said she was honored to be a part of the team providing support to the cadets, the permanent party staff and the Academy mental health team.

"I give the Academy leadership a lot of credit for recognizing that their isolated and quarantined cadets were in need of emotional support," she said. "These young people are all highly motivated and top performers, and it was very trying for them to be stuck in their rooms and miss classes. We spent time just reinforcing with them that this is where they are supposed to be



right now and they are not alone.”

She said the team was also able to help the cadets deal with non-COVID challenges. “I spent a few sessions with one cadet who was facing possible disenrollment, and I was able to give him some breathing techniques and relaxation exercises he could do before he went in front of the commandant. They seemed to help because he did well during the meeting with the commandant and they decided to retain him. There was another cadet who was in tears after finding out her aunt died unexpectedly. I spent time with her processing the loss and we soon shifted to discussing the memories of great times with her aunt during their journey together in life.”

Tommasi said the team’s work extended beyond the dorms. As a result of manning shortages, the two mental health technicians on the team, Mendez and Gaytan, were used to complement the existing resources at the Academy’s Peak Performance Center. They contributed to the operational mission by

performing patient care activities consistent with their training and competencies.

The colonel said he was proud of what the team accomplished in such a short, yet targeted, amount of time.

“I am grateful we had such a great team of Reserve mental health professionals,” he said. “We did exactly what great Citizen Airmen do. We responded eagerly, demonstrating a commitment to the Air Force. They all showed tremendous teamwork, coming together to collaborate, brainstorm and work together to provide an effective complement to the existing support networks. All of this matters because it speaks to the concept of the Total Force in action. Our mission was successful because of the coming together of the existing active-duty resources and those capabilities brought by my Reserve team. I look forward to getting more early morning phone calls.” #ReserveReady #ReserveResilient ■

# HQ ARPC Announces Changes to Senior Enlisted Professional Development Boards

By Maj. Joe Simms

Headquarters Air Reserve Personnel Center hosted the final command E-8/E-9 Development Team Board at Buckley Air Force Base, Colorado, July 27-31.

In the future, senior master sergeants will meet their functional development team board while chief master sergeants will meet the combined E-9 DT Board and Reserve Command Chief Screening Board.

These changes were made by the command in an effort to provide adequate vectors and feedback for Reserve Citizen Airmen in senior enlisted positions.

“There was a great deal of effort invested in the Command E-8/E-9 DT while there are very few key positions for senior master sergeants,” said Chief Master Sgt. Timothy White, Air Force Reserve Command’s command chief master sergeant. “As a command, we need to refocus our efforts on the functional development teams to provide more meaningful feedback to our members.”

The changes to the Command E-8/E-9 DT are a direct result of feedback from the field. The impact of these

changes will not only benefit senior enlisted members, but Airmen and NCOs as well.

“By developing our senior NCO leaders, we are also developing our junior enlisted,” White said. “This is only one of several changes coming as we evolve to meet the needs of our future senior leaders. Reforming our force development processes will allow us to be able to provide the right leader at the right time to mentor our enlisted force and meet our mission requirements.”

The goal of the Air Force Reserve enlisted force development program is to produce Airmen who possess the tactical expertise, operational competence and strategic vision to lead and execute the full spectrum of Air Force missions. This is accomplished through holding bi-annual functional development team boards and enlisted development education boards. Facilitation and oversight of these boards is accomplished by members of HQ ARPC.

“At the heart of the Air Force Reserve’s enlisted force development program is the Reserve Enlisted Development Plan

(R-EDP),” said Senior Master Sgt. Courtney Strickler, HQ ARPC’s assignments superintendent. “These development plans provide members an opportunity to communicate their personal and professional goals directly with senior leaders within their career field. In turn, the vectors and recommendations provided by the DTs are designed to ensure opportunities and expectations are transparent to all Reserve Citizen Airmen.”

By providing real-time feedback and impactful vectors, senior leaders can also enhance Airmen’s understanding of their role in force development. Connecting education, training and career broadening opportunities with these vectors, board members are better able to develop a qualified pool of resilient leaders.

As AFRC prepares for next year’s first combined E-9 DT and Command Chief Screening Board, HQ ARPC will provide updates every step of the way on the HQ ARPC website, <https://www.arpc.afrc.af.mil/>. #ReserveReady #ReserveReform

(Simms is assigned to the HQ ARPC public affairs office.) ■



Three F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter jets assigned to the 64th Aggressors Squadron fly over the Nevada Test and Training Range during Red Flag 18-3. The 64th AGRS served as part of the red forces during Red Flag 18-3 to prepare combat air forces, joint and allied aircrews with challenging and realistic scenarios. (Airman Bailee A. Darbasie)

## Green Light 926th Wing gets go-ahead for active association

By Natalie Stanley

Air Combat Command published a Total Force Integration Record of Decision July 15, stating the 64th Aggressor Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, will become an Air Force Reserve Command Active Association, officially setting up the 926th Wing to take responsibility for the aircraft and leading the squadron.

“The Air Force Reserve provides essential manpower and capabilities, enabling rapid global response, operational surge and long-term operational sustainment,” said Lt. Gen. Richard Scobee, Air Force Reserve Command commander. “This strategic depth is critical to our national defense.”

The aggressor squadron operates F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft, whose primary mission is to fly against the combat air forces, joint and allied aircrews, preparing them for tomorrow’s engagements.

The decision was officially made April 3 by Gen. Mike Holmes, then-Air Combat Command commander, Lt. Gen. L. Scott Rice, Air National Guard director, and Scobee, during an ACC-Air Reserve Component TFI round table.

The round table was held via a teleconference due to COVID-19 mitigation requirements.

“I believe the aggressor mission is ideally suited to a TFI construct, and the 926th Wing is well-positioned to use our experience and talent to increase our role in the aggressor mission which supports high-end training and testing,” said Col. Sean Carpenter, 926th WG commander. “We’re humbled, but proud, to accept this opportunity to continue proving the worth of TFI.”

The current decision gives a requirement for the transition and builds on discussions for the intent of the aggressor mission that began during a previous ACC-ARC TFI round table in September 2015.

Since the 2015 decision stating the intention for the aggressor mission to convert from a classic association to an active association, the 926th WG has been working at the local level to prepare for the conversion.

“We are already doing what we need to do so we are ready and set up for success,” said Lt. Col. George Cole, 926th Wing deputy commander for maintenance. “We are hiring people, we are working with AFRC on funded billets, and we are putting resilient leaders in key positions in the AMUs [aircraft maintenance units] to get them trained and help them learn how to run the programs.”

This decision is another milestone in the TFI concept that aims to improve the Air Force’s ability to conduct its mission through the sharing of resources between active and Reserve components, including aircraft, crews, maintenance and support.

“We are constantly evolving, the push is always to do more TFI, more integration,” said Cole. “The Reserve helps with the continuity, the stability across key positions, and the corporate knowledge we gain from working the same jets year after year and having people really turn into the subject matter experts, not just on this base, but Air Force wide.”

The 926th WG is working through the TFI round-table process to establish force structure and ultimate aircraft possession milestones.

“It’s a historic moment for the 926th,” said Cole. “It’s an exciting time for us, it allows us to sink our teeth into a mission and call it our own.” #ReserveReady #ReserveReform (Stanley is assigned to the 926th Wing’s public affairs office.) ■



# Operation Deep Freeze

## Airmen deliver life-sustaining supplies to Antarctica while keeping it COVID-free

By Airman 1st Class Mikayla Heineck

*A C-17 Globemaster III from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, prepares to land at Phoenix Airfield, Antarctica, in this February 2019 file photo. Operation Deep Freeze, the only military operation conducted in Antarctica, is carried out by Airmen from the active-duty 62nd Airlift Wing and the Reserve 446th Airlift Wing. (Art Gordon)*



*A C-17 Globemaster III from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, lands at the Christchurch Airport in Christchurch, New Zealand, Aug. 7. Before conducting the Operation Deep Freeze mission, air crew and personnel went through a 14-day quarantine to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and maintain Antarctica as the only continent that hasn't had a case of the virus. (Ron Rogers)*



A Total Force team of 30 Airmen departed Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, to start a two-week quarantine period in Christchurch, New Zealand, Aug. 5, before conducting missions delivering supplies to McMurdo Station in Antarctica.

The 304th Expeditionary Air Squadron is a deployed unit made up of Airmen from the active-duty 62nd Airlift Wing, the Reserve 446th Airlift Wing and one supply troop from the 627th Air Base Group. Their mission is Operation Deep Freeze, which annually delivers and retrieves scientists and their supplies to and from Antarctica.

The 304th EAS worked with the Royal New Zealand Air Force, the Christchurch Airport and the National Science Foundation to coordinate its arrival and subsequent quarantine before being able to carry out their mission.

"Antarctica is the last place on Earth that has been, and continues to be, COVID-free," said Lt. Col. Brandon Tellez, 304th EAS commander. "The NSF teamed up with my unit and we came up with a plan to mitigate any potential transfer of the virus to any of the people we're taking down there."

They minimized as much as possible any interaction with the aircrews and passengers, and both parties wore masks. Additionally, they took an air transportable galley and lavatory that is essentially a bathroom and kitchen on a pallet that can be used by passengers, while the aircrew used the bathroom already on the aircraft.

The NSF has gone into a sustainment mode because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They are keeping the bare minimum number of people down there just to maintain the buildings and runway and conduct the science required to be done year-round," Tellez said. "Our main goal this year is to successfully deliver the life-sustaining cargo for food, health and welfare reasons for the people who are staying down at McMurdo this year."

The 304th EAS conducts ODF missions throughout the year. The main season is typically September to November when they are taking people to Antarctica. They come back in February to retrieve most, but not all, the scientists and supplies. Then during June, July and August, the winter flying missions deliver life-giving supplies to those living on the continent for the full year.

"Flying down in the winter presents a whole slew of different challenges for our team because of the volatile weather and low visibility with 24 hours of darkness," Tellez said. "My crews are trained to fly into the Phoenix Airfield at McMurdo under night-vision goggles, where there's special lighting that is specific to that runway. There's no other C-17 or Air Force crews that are trained on this particular lighting set up they have down here."

The ODF air and maintenance crews are made up of Airmen from active-duty as well as Reserve units at JBLM.

Typically, the only maintenance personnel who would fly down during the winter flying missions would be flying crew chiefs, but the 30-person team that flew down includes a full main-season maintenance package.

If the team were to have any maintenance issues with the aircraft, it would cause significant delays due to a maintenance recovery team having to quarantine before they could conduct repairs.

"So, what we did for this mission, which was a little non-standard, is we brought down our normal main season maintenance package with about one person from every specialty in maintenance down here with us," Tellez said. "That way if anything goes wrong with the jet, we're able to fix it without having to wait for a specialist to come out."

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges it poses, the ODF mission is still being supported safely by the McChord Airmen of the 304th EAS.

In September, the main-season team was scheduled to arrive from JBLM to quarantine in Christchurch and then begin the main-season deployment during Antarctica's spring in early October. #ReserveReady

(Heineck is assigned to the 62nd Airlift Wing public affairs office.)



# 'This is it!'

## Former war refugee lives dream as Reserve Citizen Airman

By Tech. Sgt. Samantha Mathison  
and Tech. Sgt. Rolf Stibbe

The United States can be a land of opportunity for immigrants and refugees arriving from war-torn regions. As a result of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995, an estimated 40,000 Bosnian refugees immigrated to St. Louis, Missouri, in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Tech. Sgt. Muris Secerbegovic, 433rd Maintenance Group quality assurance inspector in the 433rd Airlift Wing, Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, was one of them.

Born in the city of Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Secerbegovic and his parents faced heightened ethnic tensions in the early 1990s when the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia disintegrated.

As an eight-year-old child, Secerbegovic said he didn't fully grasp the concept of the events unfolding around him, but he remembers watching news footage of tanks rolling in and military fighter jets in the skies.

According to Secerbegovic, his father, Mustaj, realized what was happening and in 1991 decided to relocate his wife and child temporarily to stay with friends in Croatia and ride out the civil unrest there.

"I remember the 'straw that broke the camel's back,' so to speak, was when my father and I went to get gas," Secerbegovic said. "It was supposed to be a quick trip, but we didn't know fuel shipments had dwindled so much because of the tension. There was only one gas station selling fuel, and the line was so long it took more than two hours. That was when my father knew it was time to go."

Mustaj stayed behind for approximately eight months before joining his family in Croatia. The plan was to go back home after things settled down in the region, but unfortunately, that did not happen, Secerbegovic said.

As the Croatians, Serbs and Bosnians began their open conflict during the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Secerbegovic family found themselves refugees of civil war. They decided to leave Croatia in 1992 and journeyed to the border of Austria, where they were put in a refugee camp.

"We were only there for about a month," Secerbegovic said. "There was a farmer who came by and offered his mother's house to some refugees because the camp was getting too full. We were lucky enough to be chosen to stay at that house."

The family's new home was in a town 40 miles south of Vienna called Leithaprodersdorf, Austria, where they lived for the next four years.

While living in Austria, the family was offered the opportunity to immigrate to St. Louis, Missouri, in the United States. With the war still raging in their homeland, they decided to start the process to become U.S. citizens, according to Secerbegovic.

In 1996, the family began their journey to the United States. Secerbegovic said he remembered looking out of the window of the terminal at Frankfurt Airport, Germany, and seeing a giant, red and white Trans World Airlines Boeing 747 and thinking this was the largest jet he'd ever seen. He said this was when his fascination with aviation began.

When the family arrived at their destination, Secerbegovic said he couldn't believe he was finally in America.

"The U.S.A. was just huge," he said. "Everything was vast and grand. The highway system, with its bridges and underpasses were impressive. The cars were huge, just like what I had seen on Bosnian and Austrian broadcasts of American television shows. Now I was sitting in one."

After graduating high school, Secerbegovic focused his dreams and ambitions on becoming an aircraft mechanic. He attained his Federal Aviation Administration Airframe and Powerplant License from Hallmark University in San Antonio, then started his aviation career at L3 Technologies, Inc. in Waco, Texas.

Secerbegovic said that one day he was working in a hangar with a canopy roof cover when he heard the sound of a Lockheed C-5A Galaxy flying overhead and watched as the whole hangar floor turned dark and then lit back up again.

*Secerbegovic inspects a C-5M Super Galaxy nose landing gear assembly at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas. (Tech. Sgt. Iram Carmona)*



*Tech. Sgt. Muris Secerbegovic, 433rd Maintenance Group quality assurance inspector, stands near a C-5M Super Galaxy at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas. Secerbegovic escaped civil war as a child in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990's. (Tech. Sgt. Samantha Mathison)*



*Muris Secerbegovic as a child with his father, Mustaj, in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, May 1983. (Courtesy photo)*

"The aircraft's shadow blocked out the sun," he said. "I walked out to the flight line and watched the aircraft circling the airport, doing touch and go landings. Throughout my whole life, I wanted to give something back to the country, which had given me safety, freedom and endless opportunity. When I saw the C-5, I thought, 'This is it!'"

Secerbegovic joined the Air Force Reserve in 2013 as a crew chief assigned to the 433rd AW, and a few years later, he decided to quit the private sector and work in the wing full-time as an Air Reserve Technician.

In his lifelong journey out of war and into a C-5 aircraft, Secerbegovic said he's learned it takes discipline, motivation and drive to achieve a dream, especially in aviation as a member of the military.

"Work can be very hectic," he said. "As a flying crew chief, the flights can be long, and trips are more frequent than ever. I am just blessed to have a good, strong family to back me up, and without my superiors' and mentors' encouragement, I would never have made it this far."

In January, Secerbegovic was accepted for an Active Guard Reserve tour at the wing to perform quality inspector duties in aircraft maintenance and is slated to return to his ART position as crew chief after the tour ends.

433rd MXG QA superintendent and Secerbegovic's supervisor, Senior Master Sgt. Brian Gray, said due to his past experiences, Secerbegovic views life with a different perspective than most assigned to the section.

"In the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic, we find ourselves working longer days with fewer people," Gray said. "He doesn't ever seem to have a bad day. Instead, he attacks any assignment or mission with a confidence and positive attitude unrivaled by most. Secerbegovic's outlook on life is contagious, and without a doubt, it increases morale." #ReserveResilient

*(Mathison and Stibbe are assigned to the 433rd Airlift Wing public affairs office.)*



# To Travel or Not to Travel



## New tool helps Reservists make an informed decision

By Bo Joyner

Members of the Air Force Reserve team now have an easy-to-use tool to help them decide whether or not it is safe to travel during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The risk of COVID-19 varies across the United States, and commanders and supervisors are responsible for assessing that risk as they review TDY and leave requests," said Mark Mercier, chief of HQ AFRC A9 Directorate's Analyses Division. "Although many detailed COVID-19 tools exist, they either require too much time to use and interpret or they are not tailored to the unique needs of Reservists."

That's why A9 led a collaborative multi-directorate effort with Lt. Col. Jessica Dees, AFRC's command public health officer, and Lt. Col. Regina Reyes, HQ AFRC's squadron section commander, to develop the Risk Assessment Plan for Traveling Reservists, RAPTR.

RAPTR was designed to provide quick and simple travel risk decision support for commanders and supervisors. It is currently a Microsoft Excel tool on AFRC's Enterprise Information Management Sharepoint, accessible both on and off the AF network with a common access card and an AFNET account, making it relatively easy for Reservists to access in order to analyze their travel decisions.

"RAPTR uses the Reservist's travel itinerary and answers to a simple checklist to provide a risk assessment," Mercier said.

RAPTR's primary source of COVID-19 data is the same source used by the federal government and most recognized COVID-19 models, the COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University. Additional data sources include Esri's geographic information system mapping data for city, county and state, as well as the Harvard

Global Health Institute's COVID Risk Levels for indicating green, yellow, orange and red "hot spot" locations.

"RAPTR basically presents the data in a more concise way without overwhelming the user with data, graphs and charts, then adds in a CCQ-inspired, SG-validated checklist," Mercier said.

"Since OSD exempted DoD Service members from leave travel restrictions on June 29, the HQ AFRC Commander's Support Staff has processed nearly 300 leave requests out of the local area," Reyes said. "The RAPTR tool has given us the ability to quickly assess risk and potential restriction of movement requirements, allowing our service members to safely take some much-needed leave during these challenging times."

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, AFRC's A9 Directorate has been researching methods and tools to help the command leadership make decisions about the safety of Reservists.

"This is what A9 does: Operational research analysts utilizing data and models to develop tools which help the command meet its operational requirements," said Col. Brian Mueller, AFRC's director of Analyses, Lessons Learned and Continuous Process Improvement.

"Part of our focus was on determining the risk for Reservists to travel," Mercier said. "Other available tools have a lot of great data and graphics, but have some challenges. We leveraged these tools for insight, tried to find ways to visualize their data for the unique needs of Reservists, but the tools did not entirely align with how Reservists perform the mission."



*Staff Sgt. Trevor Talbert, an aerospace medical technician, grabs his luggage after arriving in Shreveport, Louisiana, in May. RAPTR is a new tool to help Reservists decide whether it is safe to travel during the pandemic. (Master Sgt. Ted Daigle)*

"First, we wanted to simplify the complex data to enable quick and informed decisions. Second, we wanted to include data for all cities/counties across the country to address the fact that Reservists generally do not live close to a base. Later, Air Education and Training Command put out its own tool (the Travel Risk Assessment Tool). We used this tool as a starting point for our Reservist-focused tool, adding in the JHU authoritative data, and the checklist questions designed for the needs of AFRC."

RAPTR became operational on August 3rd. Mercier said the feedback so far has been very positive.

"The informal feedback from current users is that RAPTR is reducing risk assessment time by about 33%," he said. "The tool works well, but we continue to see how we can make it better. Look for changes and improvements as guidance changes."

RAPTR can be found at <https://afrc.eim.us.af.mil/sites/a9/A9A/RAPTR>.

There is a RAPTR user's manual on the Sharepoint site, but anyone needing assistance can contact Travis Nelson at [Travis.Nelson.31@us.af.mil](mailto:Travis.Nelson.31@us.af.mil) or Jane Stoner at [Jane.Stoner@us.af.mil](mailto:Jane.Stoner@us.af.mil). #ReserveReady #ReserveReform ■

# HAMR Time



## Indoor alternative to 1.5-mile run can help boost fitness, resilience

By Bo Joyner

Jason Ham, Air Force Reserve Command's fitness, health promotion and resilience program coordinator, is very excited about a new initiative he thinks will boost both fitness and resilience throughout the command.

Since January, AFRC has been testing and implementing the 20-meter High Aerobic Multi-shuttle Run, the 20m HAMR, as an indoor physical fitness assessment alternative to the 1.5-mile run in lieu of the weather waiver.

Reserve host installations began phasing in the new 20m HAMR test on Jan. 1. Tenant locations started phasing it in July 1.

In the past, AFRC granted a physical fitness assessment weather waiver for installations that experienced extreme weather conditions. As a result, cardiorespiratory exemptions increased throughout the command and many Reserve Citizen Airmen went lengthy periods of time without completing a composite physical fitness assessment. On average, AFRC issued 1,800 to 2,000 weather waiver exemptions annually.

The 20m HAMR will only be administered whenever a location is

experiencing extreme weather that would preclude a safely administered outdoor 1.5-mile run test and an indoor running facility is not available. The test can be safely conducted on an indoor basketball court and has the same ability to predict aerobic capacity as the 1.5-mile run.

"We're super excited about the 20m HAMR," Ham said. "We had six AFRC host installations conduct a three-month feasibility/validation study using 330 test subjects and the results show the HAMR is a valid alternative to the 1.5-mile run in assessing predicted aerobic capacity."

Ham said he believes the HAMR can also have a positive impact on a Reservist's resilience.

"There has always been a lot of anxiety for some people when it comes to the 1.5-mile run because you have to finish the entire distance to be scored," he said. "With the HAMR, the member can stop if he or she is exhausted and the test is still scored."

"We've also heard a lot of members complain over the years that how fast they can run a mile and a half is not indicative of whether they are fit to fight or not. We feel like the HAMR has more

face validity because it addresses agility, balance and coordination and closely represents a combat related skill – attributes members will need if they are serving in the AOR (Area of Responsibility)."

AFRC is planning on a two-year adaptation period for the 20m HAMR. During that time, there will be an all gain/no loss option where passing scores will be counted and unsatisfactory scores will be discarded.

Ham said the 20m HAMR is an important part of AFRC's overarching fitness program.

"The goal of the fitness program is to motivate all Airmen to participate in a year-round physical conditioning program," he said. "Health benefits from an active lifestyle increases productivity, optimizes health and decreases absenteeism while maintaining higher levels of fitness."

Reservists with questions or concerns are encouraged to contact [afrc.a1rz@us.af.mil](mailto:afrc.a1rz@us.af.mil). #ReserveResilient ■



*Reservists take part in the 20-meter High Aerobic Multi-shuttle run at Youngstown Air Reserve Station, Ohio. (Courtesy photo)*





## Brown formally installed as 22nd Air Force Chief of Staff



Secretary of the Air Force Barbara M. Barrett administers the oath of office to incoming Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. (Wayne Clark)

Proclaiming himself “proud, yet humbled,” Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr. was officially installed Aug. 6 as the Air Force’s 22nd Chief of Staff, becoming the first African American in history to lead a military service as its highest ranking officer.

In remarks following the formal “Change of Responsibility” ceremony in which he took over from retiring Gen. David L. Goldfein, the 21st Chief of Staff, Brown acknowledged an array of people who influenced his life. Among them were his wife, Sharene, and his parents, as well as a list of Air Force colleagues, including Goldfein and other “extraordinary leaders.”

Yet, cognizant of the moment in history, Brown also noted, “Today is possible due to the perseverance of those who went before me serving as an inspiration to me and many others.

“Those like the Tuskegee Airmen, Benjamin O. Davis Jr., Chappie James, African American leaders across our Air Force and military, past and present, to include today’s special guest, Ed Dwight, America’s first African American astronaut candidate,” he said.

“It is due to their trials and tribulations in breaking barriers that I can address you today as the Air Force Chief of Staff.”

Brown, who previously served as commander of Pacific Air Forces, was elevated to his new assignment during a solemn, socially distanced, 90-minute ceremony that focused on his achievements while also honoring Goldfein’s 37-year service in the Air Force and his four years as chief of staff.

(Charles Pope, Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs)

## Bass installed as the Air Force’s 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force



Chief Master Sgt. JoAnne S. Bass salutes during the national anthem at the beginning of a transition ceremony August 14. Bass succeeded Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright as the 19th chief master sergeant of the Air Force. (Eric Dietrich)

Chief Master Sgt. JoAnne S. Bass formally took the reins Aug. 14 as the Air Force’s 19th Chief Master Sergeant, in the process becoming the first woman and the first person of Asian American descent to be elevated to the service’s highest-ranking enlisted officer.

In remarks after the formal “Change of Responsibility” ceremony in which she assumed the job from retiring Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright, Bass marveled at the arc of her career and the moment in history.

“Twenty-seven years ago, I joined our United States Air Force with the plan of doing four quick years and figuring out what I wanted to do in life,” she said. “Never would I have imagined I would be standing before you today as your 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force.”

Bass’s claim to history followed by one week another major milestone, when Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr., her new boss, was formally installed as the 22nd Air Force Chief of Staff. That act made Brown the first African-American in history to become the highest-ranking officer of a U.S. military service. Brown acknowledged the significance by noting the path created by “Tuskegee Airmen, Benjamin O. Davis Jr., Chappie James and African American leaders across our Air Force and military.”

“The same holds true today,” Bass said. “It is a moment that could not have taken place without the efforts of many women who have gone before me.

“Our Air Force today is on the right side of history. We are creating not only historic moments with the first African American service chief and the first female and Asian American Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, but we are focused on setting a foundation for all Americans to see themselves in this great institution,” she said.

(Charles Pope, Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs)

## HQ RIO holds first-ever all-call for individual Reservists



Chief Master Sgt. Stacy Wilfong, Headquarters Readiness and Integration Organization command chief, and Col. Amy Boehle, HQ RIO commander, speak to members during a virtual all-call in August. This was the first all-call for the Individual Reservists of HQ RIO and was streamed live for more than 450 attendees. (Courtesy photo)

### By Staff Sgt. Tara R. Abrahams

The Headquarters Readiness and Integration Organization held its first-ever all-call for individual Reservists Aug. 28. More than 450 Airmen from around the world attended the virtual event.

HQ RIO, based at Buckley Air Force Base, Colorado, is responsible for managing the readiness of more than 7,000 individual Reservists stationed worldwide. Due to its members being geographically separated, an all-call was not possible before recent technology.

Since the pandemic hit in early 2020, the Air Force has been researching ways to enhance telework capabilities, including the Microsoft Teams-based commercial virtual remote environment. One of its capabilities is a CVR live event, which allows for hundreds of attendees to access an event without an account or log-in. These advances gave HQ RIO the opportunity to connect with its individual Reservists in an unprecedented way.

The all-call began with Col. Amy Boehle, HQ RIO commander, thanking the members for their service and for choosing to be individual Reservists. She said it is not always easy, but ensured the attendees that HQ RIO is working to make it better each day.

“You are at the center of our decision making process every day,” Boehle said. “We always ask, ‘will this decision or action make it better or worse for an IR?’ If it’s going to make it worse, we don’t do it. If it’s going to make it better, we go down that path and fight that fight for you.”

Chief Master Sgt. Stacy Wilfong, HQ RIO command chief, said leadership has been working with Air Force Reserve Command to make IR processes seamless and “make it easier from the minute you are gained all the way through your duration with HQ RIO.”

The event answered pre-submitted questions and gave Reservists the opportunity to ask more questions in the chat function, which were answered in real time by moderators from HQ RIO and detachment staffs.

The event was recorded and can be found at [arpc.afrc.af.mil/hq-rio/training](https://arpc.afrc.af.mil/hq-rio/training) along with previous HQ RIO virtual training sessions. #ReserveResilient #ReserveReady

(Abrahams is assigned to the HQ RIO public affairs office.)





*High flying foreign exchange: Maj. Kazunori Takahara, a pilot with the Japan Air-Self Defense Force's 1st Tactical Airlift Wing, poses in front of a 910th Airlift Wing C-130H Hercules aircraft at Youngstown Air Reserve Station, Ohio. Takahara is a participant in the Defense Personnel Exchange Program, where he will spend two and a half years assigned to the 910th AW. The DPEP is designed to nurture the bonds of friendship and understanding that exist between the two air forces through the exchange of ideas and tactics by the members of each service. (Senior Airman Noah J. Tancer)*